

HOW RELIGIOSITY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION
ARE RELATED IN SOUTHERN
BAPTIST MARRIAGE

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Decades of studies have researched the possibility of connections between religion and marital satisfaction. The vast majority of research during this time suggests a positive relationship between the two. Research has yet to discover specifically how these two variables are related. However, there does seem to be apparent agreement that there are connections. Heaton (1984) suggested that research needs to focus some attention on couples' level of involvement and how that involvement relates to marital satisfaction. Bahr and Chadwick (1988) suggest that there can be little doubt that the institutions of religion and marriage are intertwined. Specifically, their study in Middletown suggests that religious faith is positively associated with marital satisfaction. However, they also suggest that the nature of the connections and their intensity are yet to be explored. This need for further research is taken a step farther by Thomas and Cornwall (1990) in their suggestion that the time has come for science to take a more systematic approach to investigating exactly how religion adds to marital satisfaction.

The line of logic used by Hansen (1987) is that religion is a system that is concerned with the structure of marriage and the interactions that take place within marriage. Therefore, one would logically think that a person's level of religiosity would be related to the marital relationship and how one perceives that relationship.

In addition to this, Stanley, Markman, Peters, and Leber (1995) delineate why religious organizations are in a primary position to address the strengthening of marriages and to administer means of interventions for marriage. The first is that most marriages take place in a religious setting. Secondly, they suggest that society contains no other organization that has such an affinity for prevention as religious institutions, citing that

most pastors and priests require premarital work on behalf of the couple wanting to get married before they will perform the ceremony. Third, most churches and religious organizations already have in place a means of using an educational approach to help the community. Finally, religious communities are more embedded in culture than mental health organizations and, therefore, are less prone to cultural and ethnic barriers.

Others have cited similarities between religion and marriage. Worthington (1994) suggests that one's relationship with a spouse and with God each require love, work and faith. He also states that marriage mirrors God's relationship with Israel and Jesus' relationship with the church. In addition, Brueggemann (1977) states that Biblical faith and the family are both covenantal in nature.

Statement of the Problem

There is much in the research literature to support a relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. Research also suggests that there is a need to study the specific ways that religion affects satisfaction (Robinson, 1994; Wilson & Filsinger 1986). This study is designed to explore the question, "What is the relationship between religiosity and the marital satisfaction of couples who are from a Southern Baptist background?"

Theoretical Framework

The investigation into how religion and marital satisfaction are connected may be viewed through the lens of symbolic interactionism. A primary focus of symbolic interaction is the construction of roles and identities within those roles. For some people, their religious faith is one of the primary tools used to form these roles and identities. If thought of in terms of a sculpture, their faith would be the chisel used to form their artwork of roles and identities. As one's faith grows and matures, the chisel of faith makes finer, more distinct lines in the masterpiece of self, shaping with ever growing crispness and clarity

Another focus of symbolic interactionism is social interaction and the shared meanings that develop through them. Just as meaning develops through the interaction of two people, such as husband and wife, meaning also develops as they interact with God through prayer and Bible study. This may be thought of as triangular development of shared meaning. As the couple each interact with God, the third side of the triangle, their shared meanings become less diverse resulting in greater marital satisfaction.

From a more broad perspective, the interaction focus of symbolic interactionism also includes the great amount of social interaction that takes place through church involvement. This involvement may include: attendance of worship services, the more intimate setting of Sunday School, and fellowships. Participation in each one of these provides the opportunity for the development of shared meanings between two or more individuals and God.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to clarify how couples can utilize the positive aspects of their religion to increase marital satisfaction. In doing so, information will be produced that will help in answering questions such as those that follow. In which ways does religion enhance or detract from marital satisfaction? Which aspects of religious life are more salient to couples in terms of marital satisfaction? What roles do church attendance, devotional life and biblical principles play in marital satisfaction? Do particular aspects of religion or religious beliefs affect certain aspects of marital satisfaction? Are particular Bible teachings more salient for relating to marital satisfaction?

A reading of the literature reveals a gap in defining what there is about religion that affects marital satisfaction. This study is an attempt to begin filling that gap. The study addresses two aspects of a more practical nature. Information gleaned from this study could provide insight for therapists working with a Christian clientele who are seeking to raise the level of marital satisfaction of their clients. Also, the results of this

study may be valuable to religious groups in determining content for marriage enrichment seminars and church materials.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
Religiosity

Religiosity is a reference to a belief in and worship of God and the use of principles the participants have derived from the Bible. Religiosity has been conceptualized many different ways. In a recent article, Booth, Johnson, Branaman, and Sica (1995) conceptualized religiosity as containing five features: 1) learning about divinity through reading, 2) interacting with divinity through prayer, 3) attending church services, 4) participating in social events of a religious nature and, 5) religious influence. Allport pioneered the view of religion as either intrinsic or extrinsic (as cited in Dudley and Kosinski, 1990). Extrinsic is viewed as a type of religion that is useful for the self and interested in what can be gained for self through religion. Intrinsic is a type of religion that is valuable outside of the area of self-interest. This type of religious viewpoint gives meaning to all of life. In addition to various conceptualizations of religiosity, demographic issues such as church attendance and religious homogamy also exist.

Demographic Issues

The Role of Church Attendance

Stinnett (1992) found that strong families attended church and participated in church activities regularly. He also found that all of the strong families were very religious. Although church attendance and participation in church activities were the tools used to measure religiosity, he also added that their religious quality appeared to go deeper than that and described this as being committed to a spiritual life-style. A study by Larson and Goltz (1989) indicated that wives were influenced more significantly by qualities of relationship with their husbands than by church participation. This appears to

agree with Hatch, James, and Schumm (1986) who indicated that religious faith operates through influence on intervening variables such as marital satisfaction and emotional intimacy.

Dudley and Kosinski (1990) found that the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction were the ones in which a sharing of religious activity, such as church attendance, occurred. Bahr and Chadwick (1988) found that church attendance is positively associated with marital satisfaction. However, their study of Catholics and Protestants, found that the relationship is due to the extent of religious affiliation and not in the denomination. The difference was not between Catholics and Protestants but between those who identified themselves with a church or denomination and those who did not. Also, Robinson and Blanton (1993) reported that religiosity did not appear to ensure a high-quality marriage. More relational distance appeared with some of the more religiously involved and vice-versa.

The Role of Religious Homogamy

A study by Hayes (1990), found that people tend to choose marriage partners whose religious identification or lack thereof is identical to their own. Maneker and Rankin (1993) found that marriages of longer duration tend to be religiously homogamous. However, Heaton (1984) found that religious homogamy makes little difference once attendance is taken into account which once again points to the importance of attendance. Perhaps the relationship between attendance and marital satisfaction is indicative of the importance of living out one's religious faith. The question remains as to the specific ways in which religious orientation may enhance the marital bond.

The Multidimensionality of Religion in Relation to Marriage

Many studies fail to recognize the multidimensionality of religion or, at least, include only one dimension of religion. Thomas and Cornwall (1990) note this is especially true of studies that use religion as the independent variable.

Glock (1962) notes that religion is not the same for everyone. He posits that even in a single religious tradition which is relatively homogeneous one can find many variations. Glock (1962) lists five dimensions of religion which have become somewhat classic. The *experiential* dimension concerns subjective religious feeling. The *ideological* dimension addresses the specific beliefs that one holds. The *ritualistic* dimension encompasses such rituals as prayer, worship, and fasting. The *intellectual* dimension includes the knowledge of the basic tenets of one's religion and scripture. The last dimension is the *consequential* dimension. This dimension has to do with a person's relation to other people instead of God. This dimension could be viewed as the integration of one's religion with the day to day life of the individual.

Likewise, Abbott, Berry, and Meredith (1990) list five ways that religion may enhance family life: social support, family activities, family teaching, family services, and divine intervention. The social support aspect recognizes that religion may enlarge the family's support system or provide a support system in a family in which one may otherwise be non-existent. In a study by Lee (1988) using older couples, frequent interaction with friends was found to be the strongest positive predictor of marital satisfaction. Just as Abbott et al. (1990) found that religion may also provide activities for the family, Stinnett (1992) recognized the importance of the family spending time together in all areas of life. Couples who identify their church as a significant source of friendships find attending church services, functions, and family activities socially rewarding (Robinson, 1994). The church also provides a means of attending to crucial events as one passes through life developmental stages such as christening babies, marriage and funerals (Taylor and Chatters, 1988).

The third point of Abbott et al. (1990) is that religion teaches the family qualities that enhance family life. These qualities include such things as forgiveness and tolerance. The intentions of religious teachings for families include not only positive improvement but also teachings that counteract natural tendencies that could disrupt relationships.

Robinson and Blanton (1993) also found that moral guidance influenced such things as intimacy, commitment, and communication. Hunt and King (1978) found commitment to beliefs to be associated with commitment to maintaining better marital adjustment. Religious commitment was also found to be positively related to commitment to family by Kennedy, Cleveland and Schumm (1983).

Communication was also one of the factors Stinnett (1992) found in his study of strong families. These families spend time talking and listening to each other. Stinnett points out that these families do get mad at each other and fight, but they get the conflict in the open and discuss the situation. Ragsdale (1994) points out that relational skills are important because of their focus on other people's rights, needs and desires and that these things are also a focus of the Christian tradition. Therefore, a connection can be made between the importance of communication skills, religion and marital satisfaction.

Fourth, Abbott et al. (1990) found that one's religion may provide stigma-free family services such as parenting workshops, counseling, financial help, adoption, and abuse shelter. Churches were found to provide material assistance particularly within the black community (Taylor & Chatters, 1988).

Finally, a belief in divine intervention provides a source of comfort and guidance for families (Abbott et al., 1990). Divine intervention takes place through seeking help from God for personal and family matters. This facet of faith was referred to as spiritual support by Robinson and Blanton (1993).

Thus, there appear to be many avenues through which religion and marriage connect. Yet insight into the connections between specific aspects of religious orientation and marriage would lead to a greater understanding of how couples may grow together through their faith (Robinson, 1994).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The population consisted of couples who were members of six Southern Baptist churches in a southwestern metropolitan area. The first two volunteers were from a mailing list of those who had attended a marriage retreat. Most of the sample was obtained from references from these two couples and from couples they referred. In addition to being Southern Baptist, other requirements were that both spouses were to be in their first marriage and both spouses had to agree to participate. Although generalizability is low in this type of study and probably cannot reach beyond the couples interviewed, the logic used was to limit the sample to one religious group to increase the accuracy of information received about a relatively homogeneous group. This can also provide insight into the diversity existing within a homogeneous group such as this. Nevertheless, exploring the phenomenology of marital satisfaction from the perspective of one faith group helps to ensure validity for that group. Therefore, this particular sample was chosen for a variety of reasons: 1) convenience, 2) to help ensure accurate information about one religious group, 3) to possibly highlight the amount of diversity that exists within a homogeneous group.

Fifteen couples were first asked to fill out a demographic profile (see Appendix A). The husbands' ages ranged from 25 to 81, with a mean of 41.3. The wives' ages ranged from 27 to 78 with a mean of 39.2. These couples had been married from four to 57 years with a mean of 18.3 years, and they had from zero to three children with a mean of 1.64. Eight individuals listed that they had been Southern Baptist their entire lives. For the others, the range was from three years to 66 years.

All children over age 20 no longer lived at home and all children age 20 and below still lived at home. None of the couples had grandchildren living with them. Incomes ranged from \$10,000-19,999 to over \$50,000 with a median of \$30,000-\$39,999. One couple did not list their income.

Insert Table 1 Here

The final sample included five ministry couples. Two of these were pastors, two were youth directors and one was a minister of music. Also adding interest to the study is the fact that five of the couples stated that they became Christians after marriage. Therefore, they felt like they had something to compare with and brought that additional insight into the study.

Design

This is a phenomenological study utilizing qualitative grounded theory analysis as a means of hypothesis generation (Glaser, 1967). A phenomenological study seeks to discover and make more overt that which already exists in the experience of the person (Murphy, 1992). The unit of study was the marital dyad. Two types of instruments were used: interviews and a paper and pencil instrument. The tape recorded interviews consisted of a protocol of nine questions which all the couples were asked (see Appendix B). Additional questions were asked as deemed necessary by the interviewer to further probe issues for clarification purposes. The couples were interviewed together. Occasionally, one spouse would respond, but most of the time both spouses responded to each question. Although the same basic questions were asked of each couple, the length and type of responses varied greatly between the couples. Therefore, the length of interviews ranged from approximately thirty minutes to two hours.

The possibility exists of conventionalization taking place during the course of the study. Conventionalization is the idea that people tend to present themselves in a slightly better light than reality. This is always a possibility in this type of study. The author also would like to state that his own religious background is the same as those interviewed for the sake of acknowledging any possible bias in interpretation of the research. These are possible limitations of the study.

The marital satisfaction scale of ENRICH, Evaluating and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness, (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 1982) was the paper and pencil instrument that was used. The purpose of administering this scale was to ensure an appropriate level of marital satisfaction as compared to the other couples in the sample. Scoring was done on an individual basis (30 scores), instead of a couple basis (15 scores) to avoid the possibility of one spouse with an exceptionally low score still being included in the sample. If one spouse needed be removed from the study, both spouses would be removed.

Insert Table 2 Here

Three couples came into question as a result of administering the marital satisfaction scale of ENRICH. One of those three couples was eliminated for two reasons: 1) both of their scores were more than two standard deviations below the rest of the sample and 2) because the information received from them was qualitatively different from the response of the sample as a whole. Less usable information was received. These factors suggest that this couple possibly has a low integration between religious faith and marital satisfaction. Therefore, the final sample contained 14 couples.

The men of the other two couples, were a borderline one standard deviation below the mean and one of the women was a little below that. These two couples remained in the sample for two reasons: 1) they were barely below one standard deviation, and 2) the information received from them was qualitatively similar to the rest of the sample. The intended purpose of administering the scale was simply to eliminate those who were very different and that purpose was accomplished. The ENRICH scale was given to one spouse at a time. As each spouse left the room to fill out the scale in privacy, the interviewer asked the other spouse if there was anything they wanted to add to the interview and particularly if there was disagreement with any response of the spouse during the interview. All individuals reported consensus for all responses given.

Procedure

A letter was prepared to be sent to pastors (Appendix C) requesting they announce the study in their Sunday services and encourage those who met the criteria to participate. Letters to the volunteers (Appendix D) were also prepared to be left where they could be picked up. These letters contained the phone number of the researcher so they could call and volunteer in confidentiality. After some of these letters were given to pastors, arrangements were made to announce the study at a weekly pastors' conference held in the metro area. Information was left for interested pastors to pick up. There was no response to these approaches.

Two couples in the sample were obtained from a mailing list of couples who had participated in a marriage enrichment weekend. Letters to the volunteers were given to and mailed by one of the organizers of the marriage enrichment weekend who randomly chose couples from the mailing list. Two couples responded and references were obtained from them for other possible participants. As each couple was interviewed they were asked for further references until fifteen couples had volunteered. Some other references were also given by a minister.

The interviews were transcribed and then coded by the interviewer. For purposes of reliability, one entire interview and a portion of another were coded by a family scientist. Agreements and disagreements were recorded. There were no disagreements. Also recorded were omits which were those concepts noticed by one coder but not the other. The coding on the first interview yielded twenty-seven agreements and twenty-two omits. The second interview yielded thirteen agreements and nine omits. After these concepts were brought to the attention of both coders, there was complete agreement.

The coding process was facilitated by the use of MARTIN (Diekelmann, Lam, & Shuster, 1991), a computer program to aid in qualitative analysis. The benefit of MARTIN was the ability to organize the information that was coded. The user of the program is able to highlight selected portions of the transcribed text and assign a one-sentence summary. This information becomes a card. Cards can then be placed thematically into folders to which names can be assigned. If so desired, folders can also be placed into larger groups. Notes may also be written and attached to cards. Thus, all materials were organized by themes to facilitate further analysis.

Analysis actually began with the recording of the interviews and continued to develop all through the process of transcribing, coding and organization of the information, becoming more refined and developed as the process continued. As analysis reached a higher state of development, themes began to emerge and relationships among themes developed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

One aspect that makes this a particularly interesting sample is the fact that five couples said that they had a marriage history before they became Christians and, therefore, felt like they had a comparison point. All of these couples felt as if they were better off since becoming Christians. "We've been married about 14 years and we've had about seven years without Jesus and about seven years with Jesus and there is a big difference there I mean." The differences included having less arguments, better communication, unity, respect and selflessness.

There were times before we came to know Christ that we couldn't stand each other. We couldn't. We couldn't stand what each other did And before, we went through [arguments] twice a month But since we found Christ, we don't do that. So that's the biggest way that, you know, it has helped our marriage There is no way we would have stayed together without Christ We respect one another, which didn't happen until we found Christ.

Well we had our first eight years of life, married life, without religion and since 1980, been back into church, we've made it more than just going to church. We made religion a part of our lives and been much better since 1980 after getting back into church and practicing the biblical principles Well, before we got back into the church and started learning what the Bible taught . . . I can't speak for [wife] but I would say those first eight years of my life I loved myself more than I did anybody else. Then that put everything in the proper perspective and [I] was able easier to love God first, then love my wife in the way that I'm supposed to.

That is the best way to grow together, is to talk about God and to talk about spiritual things. That will grow you as one better than anything ever could. Cause I mean, we've had it both ways But you know, that is instilled directly from finding Christ cause like I said, we had it both ways. By finding out who you are in Christ, you're able to have more just pure fun and enjoying each other without trying to get something back you know.

In two instances, couples stated that their level of communication had increased since becoming Christians.

Him: We've always [communicated].

Her: Well, except when we first got married.

Him: Oh, well, when I first got married, I was a drunk, among other things, lots of drugs, it wasn't good. I became a Christian seven months after we got married. The Lord did a lot.

Her: I don't know how we learned to communicate.

Him: Do you want to know how we learned to communicate? You really want to know?

Her: Yeah.

Him: We found Christ.

Her: Well, yeah, but I was trying to think of one that . . .

Him: Sweetheart, it was just like the click of a switch.

Her: It was wasn't it?

The couples interviewed had a strong sense of the role that various aspects of religion played in their individual lives, couple life and family life. Biblical principles are a common thread woven throughout every aspect of the religious faith and subjective experiences that are a result of religious faith of the couples. For these couples, their faith permeates every area of their lives.

God never leads us wrong and if He gives to us a principle that He says, 'if you apply it, it will be good for you,' we apply it. . . . And that's got to promise to us, our home can be fulfilled, our family can be fulfilled when we purposely follow His principles.

I will accept the scriptural principle whether I like it or not. I mean, it may not fit my day but it will always fit my determined mind that I'm going to serve the Lord.

Our attitude when we're at work at our jobs and our attitudes and why we are there and what our goal is there and um, doing dishes, I mean pretty much, it's just everything's affected by our relationship with Christ.

The Influence of Religion on Marital Satisfaction

According to the couples interviewed, religion was manifested in their lives primarily through three ways: organization for the family, emotional support and moral guidance.

Organization of Family

One of the important areas for these couples was that their faith provided some organization for their family life. This organization manifested itself in the defining of the roles of wife and husband and how those roles were tempered by submission. Another topic discussed was how their faith influenced the role of parenting. One of the biggest social transformations in society today is the ever-changing form of the family, necessitating new parameters for the roles of family members. These couples appear to believe that the Bible offers some unchanging models dealing with family issues. These couples felt like the defining of these things contributed to their marital satisfaction because some of the decision making process was eliminated, making their marriage and family run smoother.

Role of Wife

The women had the most to say about roles. Some women tended to see their faith as a resource for defining what their various roles were such as wife, mother, and woman. These two women saw the Bible as a guide for them in fulfilling their roles. They spoke of requirements, accountability, and the blessings of God as a result of adhering to those requirements. One woman spoke particularly fondly of a women's Bible study that provided special moments of learning for her.

For myself, I mean I see the Word show me my responsibilities and . . . requirements as a wife, I know I have to be accountable for those. You know to have God's blessing in my life and in my church.

Women say 'I need my time.' That was my time to see . . . who I needed to be in Christ as a woman [and] as a mom. That's my time, to be able to grow spiritually so I can give to the people I love.

One woman related a story about a specific lesson on being her husband's helpmate that she learned over the course of about two years. Although she was busy doing things in her church, she later discovered that she and her husband had their roles reversed. She came to understand that her husband was to be the spiritual leader in the family and her

role was to be his helpmate. She discussed the situation and the results when they put roles back in their proper place.

There have been times, in the very beginning, when I started in all that preschool stuff, when we first joined this church and moved here, it was a conflict because I was doing all the preschool ministry at the church and it was more like [husband] was being my helpmate. You know, I was telling him, 'Feed the kids, get that done, come up to the church' and you know, 'I can't get your laundry done because I have to do this up here' and the roles were really reversed. And God showed me that and it took about two years, and God showed that to me and I resigned from those positions and we've kind of done a turnaround and it really is satisfying because I feel like I'm in the place now where God wanted me to be. We're designed to be his helpmate. He's not designed to be my helpmate. We reversed those things around and I allowed him to be the spiritual leader and then my ministry being in whatever area that he is working in, for me to follow instead of me to lead and him to follow. So that has really helped our marriage a lot.

One woman told a story about how the combination of her husband's business trip and her reading the Bible taught her more about her role as a wife. However, she does mention that what she learned is a different model than what people usually use.

I mean, I remember the time when [husband] had gone on a business trip [out of state] for two weeks and I was reading in I Peter where it's about a wife's role and really got a grip on what they said. Just as Sarah called Abraham 'lord', you know. And I know I remember there have been times in my early Christian life when I read that and no way. But [husband] was gone and I had, I grew to appreciate him after I had to mow the lawn for that two weeks and I would smash my fingers in garage doors and all those things that I take for granted that he does and when he came back home he was like, what are you talking about? I kept calling him 'lord' and I was so happy to see him. You know, I don't know that I ever, if I hadn't been in the Word and reading that stuff that I wouldn't know and I wouldn't know some of the things that the Lord directs a woman to do. . . . That's not how the world models it. And if I didn't have God's Word to guide me and show me the right way to do it, my other model, the only other model available, is in what you see on television, you need to be your own person, you need to have your own mind, you need to have your own job, and you need to be liberated. You can't be staying at home, or certainly you can't be calling your husband "lord" for sure. You know, certainly don't obey and, you know, love your husband like Christ calls us to love.

Another wife was particularly impressed with her husband's ability to carry out what he perceived to be his role in the marriage. He was able to gracefully fulfill this role regardless of whether she agreed or not; and she seemed to respect him for that because his focus was on what would provide the best consequences.

I see a lot of women that [say] 'I want to do that, I want to go do this.'
 And I used to have that attitude really bad; but it was him not being afraid to tell me no. He's real good about saying no. But a lot of men wouldn't be, you know. He's not worried about hurting my feelings. He's more concerned about what's right or he's more concerned about the outcome of it or the consequences of it. . . . He wasn't afraid to be his position in the marriage, see, and that's important. I mean, you do it with grace but it's very important for a husband to be able to communicate to her what he does not want her to do or what wouldn't be best because the outcome, he's responsible for. Like Adam didn't speak up, you know.

Another woman noted that God has specific roles for every member of the family. She also mentioned that she believed in the importance of staying under the protective umbrella of her husband and that there are consequences for moving out from under that umbrella. She also mentioned the responsibility of the husband just as the woman mentioned in the above quote.

God has specific important positions for husbands and wives and for children and you have to find out what those are. You're never going to come up with them on your own. You're going to have your ideas and he's going to have his. Position is everything because if you do things out of your position, you're not protected if you get out from under the umbrella of your husband's, you're not protected anymore. You know that's not specific enough, but . . . I've paid consequences of that, of being out from under his protection umbrella. Ultimately, the husband is responsible for all the decisions that he makes right or wrong in the family, so he's got that on his head.

Role of Husband

The concept of the husband being the head of the family is very similar to the concept of the wife being the submissive partner. With this issue also, the thought that appeared to be foremost on the mind of the husbands was recognizing the responsibility that fell to them as a result of the biblical injunction of being the head of the family. This

was primarily manifested in the idea of the husband being the party responsible for final decisions. The basic idea the couples seemed to relate was that while the decision itself may not be pre-determined, if one spouse has to make a final decision, which spouse will make that final decision is pre-determined.

But the principle that the male runs the household, or the family, or makes the decisions for the family. That's something that, before we came to Christ, we didn't do. You know, we fought about it. Now it's just, we've talked about it, you know. I told her, I said, 'we will talk about things but when there's a disagreement or something, someone has to make a decision. Well, it's my job to make the decision.' And very rarely does that happen. I mean, it doesn't happen. I don't know if it has happened.

Roles of individuals in the household. Even though [wife] and I make every effort to make decisions [jointly] . . . when it comes to a place where one individual has to be a deciding factor we generally try to apply biblical principles of the man being the head of the household. But we, just about all decisions and things like that are corporate work. And in fact we even try to involve the kids in major decisions.

The husband's role of head of the household was also manifest in the lives of these couples through spiritual leadership provided by the husband. Specific things mentioned are the husband being responsible to seek God's direction for the family and providing spousal encouragement to attend church.

Being head of the household. It's not an egotistical thing for me at all, it's more of a humbling, big responsibility that I am, I am responsible for leading the family in the way that it's supposed to go, you know, under God's direction.

[Husband] is the leader in our household . . . a Christian leader, and on those days I don't want to go [to church] he really is encouraging for me to go, you know, so that makes a big difference in my relationship to him because I feel like I can look up to him and you know, he is the head of the household and, you know, I think that's important.

Another couple related a story that helped to define being the head of the family. For this couple the biblical injunction of the husband being the head of the home was not to be confused with being the primary breadwinner. They related a story about a period of several years in their lives when she worked full time while he worked a part time job so

he would have time to work with youth at church. They did this because they both believed that was God's will for them at that time. In spite of the discrepancy between their salaries the situation did not create a role reversal in relation to who was the head of the family. He summed up the story in this way.

Our actual roles as husband and wife in marriage to each other, uh, maybe the role of primary breadwinner changed but that's not the same. Some people equate that, being the big money maker in the family, as being the head but that's not the same.

Effects of Submission on Each Role

In connection with the role of the woman, submission was also an issue. One might expect a discussion about submission to be an unpopular subject with wives. However, in every interview, the woman was the one to first bring up the subject. Women talked about submission to their husbands as being positive. Although men appeared to view submission in a positive light also, men tended to discuss the extra responsibility placed upon them by their wife's submission. The common scripture either specifically mentioned or alluded to was Ephesians 5:22-25. Although some of the women had a problem with submitting to their husbands in the beginning, their feelings changed as they experienced submission. Another woman viewed submission as simply different positions in the marriage:

When we first got married . . . I really had a difficult time with being submissive to him But it wasn't a problem with him, it was a problem I had with my relationship with God.

I had to learn submitting. I had to learn it. I asked him everything before I did it because he has a different discernment and God's given him a different position, level. Spiritually, we're on the same ground . . . to Christ. But our positions are different in our marriage and so I would ask him things.

Some women called submission to their husbands a blessing and noted that there was freedom as a result. However, one woman said that submission needed to be true submission rather than just lip service that results in just going through the motions of submission. She told a story about needing summer clothes to go to a volleyball game and

the freedom her husband gave her in selecting those clothes. This freedom was the result of an earlier discussion with her husband during which he said that the clothes she wore made her too physically attractive.

I think a real hard one for women is, "wives submit to your husbands", and there's a misunderstood thing in, out of fear, a lot of women don't apply that and don't do that. And yet I've found that it's been the biggest blessing for me, in that there's so much freedom when I submit to [husband].

And I came in the front room and said 'I don't have anything. I don't have shorts or I don't have anything that's decent.' And he said, 'Well, go buy you something.' And I said 'What?' And he said, 'whatever you want.' And so he left to go on and I was going to take the car so I could go by the store and buy something and I thought . . . he didn't say that in the past because we wouldn't be on the same wavelength. I would turn and go in a different direction. We didn't have the same ideas. I wasn't submitting to his will but because I had gone to him two years before that day and said I want to please God, I want to submit to you in this area. He knew he could tell me 'buy whatever you want' because he knew I was lined up. He knew that I wasn't going to go to the store and buy something and show up at a ball game in a pair of shorts too short or a tight shirt or tank top or something. And so there's so much freedom for him and me in that. And so, I'm learning there is freedom in that, in really submitting and not just lip service and not saying to my friends, 'I can't go. My husband said I can't.' or something like that. But in really submitting to [husband], submitting my will to his will and he submits his will to the Father's will. And there's so much freedom in that because what God wants, he wants. I want what God wants and I want what [husband] wants. And that really settles it where there is no conflict in that area.

However, her husband discussed mutual submission in the marital relationship and reported that there was also freedom for him in that mutual submission. He noted the kind of freedom he was talking about wasn't of the same kind that most people think of. He said that he has the freedom to destroy his life if he wanted to but the kind of freedom he was talking about resulted in just the opposite of that.

And you are responsible to each other. Your actions are important to each other because I need to kind of keep an eye on her that she's not missing something. That there's not a blind spot in her life that she's missing that's going to cause us to crash. And she does the same thing for me. And so there's freedom in the sense that, I find in my submission to her that there's freedom from myself if that makes any sense. I don't have to worry that my

flesh, my selfish desires, is going to destroy our marriage . . . is going to destroy my life or whatever. And so there is a freedom there. It's almost contradictory that in submitting, in losing my life, I find it. So it's not freedom in the sense that most people think. I mean I could go out, I've got freedom, I guess I could go out and do anything I wanted to. I could go out and have an affair if I wanted to. But that's not really freedom because that enslaves me to my selfish fleshly desires and ultimately that boomerangs around. We've all seen that happen. Somebody's got the freedom to go do whatever they want to but in the process, they've got the freedom to destroy their own lives. And by being submissive and accountable to each other, we are, I guess, safe then.

Mutual submission was not the only thing the men discussed. The primary subject that men raised with the issue of submission was the additional responsibility that was to be assumed by them as a result of their wife's submission. They also mentioned fairness, their own submission to God, what Jesus said about submission, and His example of submission to the point of death.

We understand the fact that even though that says submissive that it means along with that comes responsibility to the man to be responsible, and so, that's the way we try to, try to play that out . . . I'd still like to say as far as responsibility, they're responsible, it's a greater responsibility if you take that role of being fair . . . it's just a whole lot more than just being in charge, it's not that. It's not, it's not her being submissive that she is any less than man. That's a very complicated issue.

I guess the scripture that keeps coming back to my mind is Christ talking about dying to yourself. And I think it's Galatians, Paul talks about wives are to submit to husbands but yet husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and you are to be willing to die and so there's a relationship of mutual submission. I think that's what you base a marriage on.

For me, I'm thinking of the verse, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. That's very complex when you think of all the things Christ did in His sacrifice. It's a massive responsibility. I try not to think about it [laughter]. In everything that I do, I hope that is what I'm doing.

The wives that were interviewed also identified such characteristics of submission as facilitating decision-making in the family and mutual submission becoming easier as devotion to Christ grows.

The first thing I think of is what I mentioned a while ago about God's structure for the home. There was a time when there was a decision to be

made, and we weren't in agreement and . . . I submitted to [husband] and his decision. It kept us from being at odds with each other that I submitted because the Lord told me to. And it wasn't him saying I'm the boss, you're going to do what I say and it solved conflict. There's a jillion biblical principles, you know.

And I think the more time we spend with Christ, the more we line our will up with God's will and the more comfortable we are submitting to each other because I know [husband] doesn't want anything for my life except what God wants for my life and I don't want anything for his life except what God wants for it.

Giving the Lord the proper place, spiritually submitting to Him, makes it easier to submit to each other which is diametrically opposed to what we are as humans, you know, and without being submissive to the Lord we won't be submissive to one another, enjoying together in body, soul and spirit.

He blessed that because what He desires is that we come together in prayer to Him. In that way we are at the submitting point to surrender to each other as well and He can work from that.

The Role Together as Parents

Couples also discussed their mutual role, that of parenting. Some expressed the view that children are a gift from God and, in fact, believed that the lives of their children still belonged to God. The responsibility of raising those children, however, belonged to them.

And having our little girl . . . realizing that great responsibility of raising a child, that she is not ours at all . . . but that she's definitely a gift from God.

Long ago, he was having seizures continually and on medication . . . he had his neck crippled and God healed him . . . so we have our children because of God and so we have to put Him first . . . God and then family in that order, it's God that gives us family and children; that's what I believe.

Several of the couples interviewed believed in using biblical techniques to raise and discipline their children. This provided some agreement about parenting that could possibly eliminate problems between spouses.

We've recently gone through Growing Kids God's Way and we're going to be teaching that in our home and the principles on raising your children. Uh, there's a lot that the Bible says about that. And when we first started going through the material and it was presented to us and the scripture, just to

back it up and all those sorts of thing. It was a real eye opening thing that we didn't have to disagree about it because it was from God's Word. All we had to do was figure out how to apply it to our lives.

He reinforces and He encourages in how we discipline and how, you know, you spoil a child if you don't spank. That's a guideline that tells that corporal punishment is right and in Proverbs and Psalms there's just all kinds of things in there that tell you how to raise you child.

I don't want them to . . . have premarital sex or whatever, suffer the consequences of a unwanted child or some disease or whatever. But I want them to know what God says is right or wrong.

There's a lot of people who wind up buying how-to books and trying to find the right technique of parenting and all the right things to do and the only inspired manual for parenting is the Bible.

Other comments about parenting included realizing that children will tend to do what they see their parents model if there is a discrepancy between what parents say and what they do. Also mentioned was the importance of the task of parenting and the time requirements to be a good parent.

Emotional Support

These couples said that they received emotional support from seven factors that were influenced by their faith. Those seven factors were: fidelity, communication, encouragement, selflessness, love, physical intimacy, and unity.

Fidelity

Many couples discussed the issue of fidelity in their marriages. Fidelity was a very important issue to this group. One wife suggests just her husband's availability is important to her. "Just knowing that he's there when I need him. I'm here when he needs meCleave to your husband, don't go out and see somebody else." The biblical injunction to cleave only to their spouse was raised many times. This man acknowledges scripture that states that a man should be careful concerning who he is with:

God's Word say's that He hates divorce In chapter four, [Proverbs] it talks about being satisfied with the wife of your youth Proverbs chapter 7 about, you know, wise men will not go in places and be with

women he shouldn't be and then . . . I believe it's also chapter five there's a warning about that.

One woman discussed the importance of sexual fidelity. She stated the effect of improved sex life is a result of the fact that she does not have to suspect her husband is having an affair because she has trust in him holding to biblical principles concerning fidelity.

The fact that the scripture says that the husband is to love the wife of his youth and be satisfied by her alone and the wife is to be the wife of one man, not to be having sex with anyone else It's not ever so much a question that I worry about fidelity in our relationship so that biblical principle in that particular area brings so much peace because that's the one thing that I think affects so many other people's marriages, is fidelity In that particular area, that particular biblical principle does improve our sex life because I guarantee you it wouldn't be very enjoyable if I suspected that he was seeing somebody at all. But because of that aspect I know that he is all mine and I am all his and that there is no other threat or no other relationship outside of that.

One of the most frequently mentioned topics dealing with fidelity, however, was their belief that marriage was to be a lifetime commitment from before they were even married. This understanding of lifetime commitment was a result of what they had learned from the Bible, either by reading the Bible themselves or from teaching they had received.

If you married, you're committed to that person for life, and there's no question And I think first of all that married couples have got to have that in the forefront; I'm committed to this person until they die no matter what.

Another wife stated, "When we married, that's what we expected, to stay married." Her husband responded by saying, "Well, I feel that God made woman for man but he just made one for a man." A husband mentioned, "It's our belief that God instituted marriage It's supposed to be one woman, one man for life and that's just what we believe Principles on fornication and those things obviously play a role." Another man and a woman echoed the same beliefs; the man added a secondary thought that the high number of divorces was a result of not entering marriage with a lifetime commitment. "It wasn't a trial marriage you know, we made a commitment." Another subject responded, "The

training that we had, we felt that divorce wasn't an option when we married.

Unfortunately, I think it is now in a lot of cases." According to one respondent,

Just the things because of our religious background, because of our particular faith and what we believe enhances it because that we both have a common agreement, beliefs that divorce isn't an option. When we entered into marriage we knew it was forever.

Communication

The faith of these couples also had an impact upon their communication in various ways. Some couples suggested that their faith enhanced their communication skills and others said that their faith simply provided more for them to talk about. One should be careful to make a clear delineation between the two. To have more to talk about does not necessarily imply that communication skills are being honed in the process. These couples said that their faith gave them more things to talk about:

Discussing about what God is doing in each of our lives and what He's doing in our lives and what He's got planned for us for the future. We do a lot of . . . dreaming and talking about God's involvement in our lives and how that's . . . affecting us now and . . . in the future. All of our plans we made together surrounded around that, you know . . . I can't imagine being married to someone and not being able to share with them what God has done in my life.

I know a lot of times we just sit and talk. It seems that the majority of the time it's something about or it will end up being about the Lord. The times on Saturday morning when we sit and drink coffee and talk. Or anytime we are talking about plans for the future, it seems the Lord is always a part of that.

This man suggests that faith produces forgiveness which facilitates communication through the removal of barriers:

If we didn't forgive each other then there would be barriers and we wouldn't feel free to communicate. And . . . I guess you always hear communication is the number one problem. And I think a lot of it deals with the aspect of forgiving the other person.

Another man said that, in turn, when couples communicate a lot of hurts are taken care of:

You have more in common, both of us being Christians . . . Communication

can heal a lot of hurts As a Christian you're not so ready to slice when you're talking. You can also communicate a lot and cut each other up But as a Christian, of course, your language ought to be somewhat pure The things you say to one another ought not to be so, as judgmental as they would be otherwise.

Therefore, forgiveness appears to facilitate communication which, in turn, facilitates healing. Also, a wife expressed her use of the Holy Spirit through prayer to communicate to her husband when they didn't seem to be able to communicate well.

I know a few years ago, as God changed both our lives, kind of at different times, different stages, communication had become really hard and uh, maybe one spouse doesn't know it, the other spouse is thinking in their head or driving the car or, you know, being frustrated because they can't express. The other one doesn't know how to do it. I began using the Holy Spirit to communicate and he would just respond to that and that really became a important healing part in communication . . . you can't hardly pray with the wrong motives or attitude. And that will get my heart right.

Encouragement

Some women discussed the idea of encouragement. One woman talked about the spiritual support received from her husband concerning daily Bible readings. Another woman discussed how she and her husband gave mutual encouragement when sermons touched their lives.

Again, I have to fall back on saying that he's my support with even that because that's a daily, I mean weekly struggle for me; I'll put it that way. I tend to find all kinds of things to do, to play with, instead of sit down and read my Bible. And he's always encouraging me to, he's always asking me if I've read my Bible that day

I do see attendance as in uh, by us both sitting under [pastor] that uh, whatever he is preaching about, that there have been times that the Lord spoke real specifically to me about something and not to [husband] but that he knew what was said and he knew that it affected me and he encouraged me in that. Or if something was said that I knew . . . was calling [husband] to a closer walk with Him that I could encourage him.

These two women discussed how they and their husbands encourage and support each other even though their hobbies and free time activities are in diverse directions:

Well . . . he understands the things that I'm interested in and I understand the things that he is interested in. Uh, an example is, he's really into computers

and things like that and I'm real involved with the children's group. And even though his love may not be to have tons of little children around him, he still supports me in that and helps me when I need help and things like that. And in the same respect, even though I work with computers all day, he likes to play with them at home; and even though I'm not real interested in all the stuff he tells me, I'll sit there and listen to him.

I think each one likes to have their own time too, like he's a golfer. I hate golf. I'm not a golfer. I'd rather stay home and work on my crafts stuff and he doesn't bother me when I do my craft stuff and why should I bother him when he does golfing. And I don't care for him to go golfing. I want him to go so I can do my crafts.

Selflessness

The idea of selflessness was couched in the Christian concept of dying to self. As they tried to live out this concept of dying to self, they found themselves unselfishly serving their spouses with the intention of putting their spouse's needs before their own. This woman makes the connection between the biblical principle and how it applies to marriage:

We are called to die to ourselves so that Christ can live in us. But it applies to our marriage too though. Not that we die to ourselves but it's putting . . . that other person's needs . . . sometimes above your own.

This man talked about the principles involved and then his wife gave an example of how they put those principles into action:

Him: And I guess, for me the principle that really underlies everything else is the principle of dying to self . . . Everything else in the Bible is kind of an application or illustration of that principle . . . it's hard not to have a good marriage if you both put the other one first. It's hard to have much conflict in that area unless you're arguing over who's going to serve the other one.
 Her: I know it's something, and it's been kind of neat, although it's been kind of a change. It's turned into something that we've been able to kind of honor each other. One of the cars has a broken air conditioner and it's been almost a race. It's kind of a symbol of love when I walk outside and I see that he took the car without the air conditioner. And if I happen to get out of the house first, I'm trying to take the car without the air conditioner so I can esteem him higher. Then I'll go up to church and I'll come out and he will have taken the good car up there and taken the hot car home. And it's almost a game for us and it's a real symbol of love when you walk out to the car and you're both trying your hardest to get to the worst car so you can let the other one have the good one. That just really beats me because that's

not saying, 'I love ya, I'll see you later.' Man, he really does love me. It's 110 outside and he's in a three piece suit and he's insisting that we have the car with the air conditioner.

Another couple collaborate on an explanation of how the call of Christ is a call to put others first and that includes their spouse. She also mentions that this principle had an effect on who she chose as her spouse.

Him: That's the goal of being other oriented. That's had a great effect on our marriage. All she wants to do is please me and all I want to do is please her.

Her: I think the whole call of Christ is to serve others, to not be self-centered and . . . I don't see how marriages work when you are . . . And when everything you do is unto the Lord, I mean, even things that I don't want to do for [husband], I'll do because I know that it would please the Lord for me to serve him instead of be selfish and lazy and those sorts of things that I'd really rather do.

Him: It'd be a very one-sided marriage relationship if it was that way It's nature's tendency I think to be selfish. I want this and if you're not both other-oriented, it would be very one-sided.

Her: I saw a lot of that with people I dated. And I could see how, it was like, 'What am I getting out of it? What's in it for me?' And it was a very selfish sort of thing and that's why I never married none of those guys.

Love

Love was given as another necessary condition of marriage. However, these couples tended to discuss the New Testament concept of agape love, an unconditional, giving, type of love that originated as the result of their Christianity rather than the emotional type of love usually thought of. After hearing her husband say that love covers a multitude of sins, a wife furthers the concept of love:

Him: God says, you know, love covers a multitude of sins.

Her: I mean the unconditional love that Christ gives, that agape love, we can only love our mates through Christ's love. We can't fully love them in the right way unless we have that love first cause . . . we are just unable to give it out to the measure that is needed What love is, you know, love . . . doesn't keep record of wrongs, love always forgives and you know, those basic principles apply to the person you're with day in and day out.

One man expressed his belief that if people were able to actually live out the love chapter, they would experience a very noticeable difference in their relationships.

The love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13 is one I think of. If, instead of just reading it, people have tried to practice just two or three of the principles that are listed there, what love is and what love is not, would make a huge difference, not being proud, not being arrogant uh, does not seek it's own, is not unbecoming I think too, just knowing that God's love is unconditional and trying to turn around and practice that on a human level is important to me.

Physical Intimacy

Three men in particular mentioned that there are also biblical principles that relate to the sexual relationship between husbands and wives. One man mentioned these principles while referring to biblical principles that play a role in marital satisfaction: "I think biblical principles of physical relationship and how the Lord has allowed us to enjoy even the gift of sex." The following gentleman discussed the biblical injunction concerning withholding sexual relations from one's spouse:

The Old Testament deals with, very clearly with husbands. It deals with the intimacy part; it deals with when you should withhold from one another; it deals with when you should . . . not withhold from one another. We've never used that as a tool against one another.

Another man reflected the idea that sex was created by God and that sex contains a special intimacy not found in any other way.

I've got to say that sex life has to be an integral part of it and again I have to go back to creation and God created man and woman and said, 'Adam this is Eve, Eve this is Adam. Today I bless your marriage. I brought you together, now be fruitful and multiply.' And so that is a part of, and see, the world has this idea that sex was something that happened after the fall, it's part of the fall. Adam and Eve would just sit around and recite scripture verses until after the fall and then decided to have sex. But in reality, sexual relations were in, were created by God as part of the marriage relationship and so they are I think an integral part, and important part because there is a union there that is just no other place.

Unity

There appears to be a special bond found in these couples. This unity, they say, is impacted by their Christian belief system. They often refer to this unity in terms of being one flesh. Two couples expressed that marriage was instituted by God and that the

Biblical injunction of being one flesh is something that has helped their marriage: "There's a passage in the Bible that, you know, the wife and the husband they should become one and that's how we feel."

For me with no question, it advances my marriage because I know from the Word of God that marriage is a sacred institution that He has instituted for man and woman to live together as one flesh.

Three couples indicated that church attendance was something that helped create unity for them. "I think Bible study, you know, going to church and having that closeness. I mean, it draws you closer together to have one aim in anything." "I'm not sure exactly how that [church attendance] ties in directly with marriage. It ties in directly with life itself I guess but uh, marriage specifically, it just keeps us together and on the same line I think." One man said that children also help to create unity in a marriage. "I'd say that in a love relationship, children unify you like nothing else does." Others cast their votes for prayer, family devotion, discussing spiritual things, and the marital sexual bond as creators of unity for their marriages.

We become, well, we become closer but we, at the same time open ourselves to, we lay it out for each other, we drop our guard. That's what I'm thinking. And I'm able to be more open and honest. So as far as . . . as far as when we have prayer time together and our family time.

But a lot of times, it's hard for husbands and wives to talk about spiritual things. It takes years for them to be able to do that. Because you feel like you're revealing your most inward private things but yet that's how you get to grow as husband and wife. That is the best way to grow together, is to

talk about spiritual things. That will grow you as one better than anything ever could.

Moral Guidance

The faith of these couples also provided moral guidance. The means by which moral guidance was provided are numerous including: intervention, decision making, spiritual growth, God's sovereignty, grace/forgiveness, providence, Jesus-modeling, patience, prevention, and life organization.

Intervention

There were a few situations where the information provided about faith seemed to go beyond ordinary guidance. The words that were used indicated that the word "intervention" would be a better description: "I think it plays an important role because I think God gives the right devotion for the specific time that you have a need."

Cause he will call me on things a lot of times when I get mad at my teenager or whatever. You know, he'll call me on it; he's brought scripture to me before, you're not supposed to get that angry. I don't care. I'm angry.

There was a point in our marriage where we were facing a real point in crisis. I didn't know what was going to happen and it was real, just really a frightening time and I know that I read in Nehemiah where Nehemiah talked, and I can't quote the scripture, but it talked about he surveyed the damage and then said; 'let's start rebuilding the wall;' and I know that sticks out in my mind as one that is real significant to me.

Decision-making

Two people, a male and a female, specifically mentioned that they turned to the Bible for answers to the issues of life. She said, "And not knowing how to deal with an issue and looking at the Bible and finding out what God would say about it is important." He said he was usually able to find the answer to a problem in the Bible. "Well, just believing in the Bible. I don't think there's anything in that Bible that's not the truth. If I come up to a problem I can generally get the answer for it in the Bible." Another man said the Bible is the measure for their household. "We view that [Bible] as the yardstick by which everything is measured in our household."

Three other couples noted that their faith played a role in how decisions were made in their family, one by allowing the husband to make the final decision, and two others by allowing principles clearly set forth in the Bible to make the final decision for them. "We weren't in agreement and I submitted to [husband] and his decision. It kept us from being at odds with each other that I submitted because the Lord told me to." "It was a real eye opening thing that we didn't have to disagree about it because it was from God's

Word." One husband pointed out that what the Bible says is not to be disputed indicating that this serves as a means of arriving at decisions.

And our church is, 'This is what the Lord says; this is what we're going to do.' If you don't like it, you know, pretty much, it's not to be argued about. This is what God says. It's laid out right here; it's not to be changed.

One man gained insight for decision-making and God's will by asking himself what kind of advice God would give if He were here. Another man stated that if he didn't listen to God, his marriage would be affected. "And if I decide to go off in left field and not listen to Him, that affects my marriage, you know, very quickly I think."

I mean if you look at it through what would God have me do. If He were here what advice would He give me? If you'll include that a lot of times you'll make the right decision. If you just do what you want, you'll get in trouble.

Spiritual Growth

Many statements reflect the idea that when they grew spiritually they also tended to grow together as a couple. In other words, spiritual growth resulted in couple growth. "I'd have to say it enhances because if you follow the scripture and do all the Lord teaches then you become close to each other." "I think our faith enhances our marriage. I think that as individuals as we grow in our relationship with the Lord, that we grow closer together." "I think the devotion life of . . . being pleasing to God individually makes it easier to be pleasing to one another."

I have to realize that, you know, if he's not being pleasing to me as a husband against God's Word, he's going to have to answer to God first and that's a whole lot bigger. I mean it's a comfort to me to know that God is as interested in him being a good husband as I am.

God's Sovereignty

Many couples reported that their belief in the sovereignty of God played a role in their marital satisfaction in one way or another. Just knowing that God is in ultimate control served these couples in a variety of ways. "He is sovereign in all things and He is not going to reveal Himself in one way to me and in another way to her that's going to pull

our marriage apart." "Just knowing that God brings trials into our life and knowing that God does that for our good and His glory, not for [husband] trying to make my life miserable and things like that." This couple expressed that knowing about God's sovereignty relieved marital pressure for them:

Her: It took some pressure off of us knowing that God's in control of our marriage. I mean, not that we don't work at it, but it's not like we have to try to make things work, because we know, we're relying on God to just, kind of keep everything kind of in gear and keep our focus straight and take the pressure off us.

Him: I don't think I expect so much from [wife] uh, if I, I realize that God's the one in charge, the one in control. I think it takes my eyes off her some, as far as expecting what she needs to be doing.

Her: I feel like not all the burden's on me too because . . . God is the head of the church and also, of course, of each Christian, so we have to look to God for guidance and I don't have to worry about what's going to happen tomorrow, so I think that's real important.

Her: It's a great comfort for me to know that . . . it's just not the two of us involved in this relationship . . . we've married almost twenty five years but, I've come to the point that if he acts like I don't think he should or just doesn't do what I perceive to be the right thing to do . . . maybe in our early years, my tendency would be to straighten him out but now I have to realize that, you know, if he's not being pleasing to me as a husband against God's Word, he's going to have to answer to God first and that's a whole lot bigger. I mean it's a comfort to me to know that God is as interested in him being a good husband as I am.

Grace/Forgiveness

Grace was another theological concept that was often raised by those interviewed. Couples tended to recognize the grace that God showed toward them as individuals and, as a result, realized that they were to show grace to their spouses in like manner:

I believe grace is very important because it's what gets us to heaven for one thing . . . I believe it's the glue of the marriage too . . . I think that . . . an understanding of God's grace, of what that means and His love. Grace in that, in two ways, His grace that gives you strength to be obedient to Him and to keep obedient in line with our marriage relationship and the grace meaning forgiveness and love, unconditional love when we blow it. So I think God's grace is the most important thing to me in our marital relationship . . . it's not whether we have, . . . our devotional every night but it's if we keep God's grace intact and keep our eyes on Him and what that

grace means. To me, grace is one of the most important, the most important thing It's something you don't deserve. It's acceptance and you don't deserve it, and you deserve to be cast away and you're not. And I believe that's what you have to do in a marriage too I mean if you don't deal with each other in grace, I don't think you're going to make it.

Oh, we've had a lot of, not a lot of things, but there have been things, but we've always been able to forgive and forget. If God can forgive us we sure can forgive each other I know I do so many things wrong and God can forgive me and then if he does something wrong that offends me, if I can't forgive him, why then I have no right to expect God to forgive me. I really truly believe that with all my heart.

Providence

Two couples talked about the providence of God and how that related to them. One couple said that they wanted to give to the church building fund. They prayed about how much to give. They were surprised when they discovered, through prayer, how much God wanted them to give. The amount was a large sum of money in relation to their salary. God then provided almost the exact amount. Another man said that God's provision relieved the stress their marriage would have otherwise experienced.

But we prayed about it, you know, and asked God if that's really how much you know, that He wants us to give and we felt that it was and the next what, I guess one week later we got a check in the mail for within six dollars of however much it was that we wouldn't have ever planned on getting and . . . we just know it was from God.

If it wasn't for God it would put stress on us financially . . . when you have financial problems, it puts stress on a marriage, and we hadn't had that because God had always taken care of us. He always will.

Jesus-modeling

Many couples used Jesus as a model for their lives. This modeling was sometimes couched in the term "Christ-like" and was a reference to attempting to model their lives and character after the example of Jesus they read about in the Bible. This idea is summed up in this man's short statement, "I think Jesus shows us the right way to be." Others were more specific in how this act of modeling Jesus helped their marriage. "And yet just principles of God as far as how Jesus acted toward other people and relating that to how

we should act." "I think if the person is growing inside . . . they are more Christ-like and not . . . as, you know, judgmental " "But being conformed to the image of Christ is going to take care of a lot of things."

That is the thing that makes me more Christ-like and if I can be more Christ-like then I'm going to be a better wife and mother than if I didn't have and wasn't reading God's Word and doing a daily Bible reading.

As far as the willingness to change and the desire to listen to the Lord and to be more like Christ. And the humbling thing about that, I'm a sinner and I'm not perfect but I want to move in that direction. And if somebody points out an area that I need to work in, I need to be working in that direction instead of just saying, 'That's just the way I am.'

Once you realize what Jesus has done for you, then it's easy to be less selfish This weekend, they talked about the crucifixion and we're reminded what Jesus did and then you quit thinking about yourself, thinking what all He did for me. And you realize what He did and it gets you away from being selfish.

Patience

A couple of people mentioned that patience was related to their faith and the patience that they have learned through their faith has helped their marriages. "Definitely helps in the patience area because . . . in marriage you need a lot of patience."

I feel that it enhances our relationship because it gives us, it gives me more patience. Before we had come to know God, I was a very impatient person. I didn't put up with things. If something bothered me, I was very outspoken about it . . . with no regard to her feelings.

Prevention

For some couples faith contained an element of prevention. Faith was seen as a preventative measure that could possibly protect against some negative life situations through avoiding them before they happened.

Him: If we'll try to do the thing God wants us to do we'll avoid a lot of heartache and trouble and anger and it goes on and on. Whenever there's a problem it goes back to some sort of sin. Sometimes we're both wrong, sometimes it's me, sometimes it doesn't matter His doctrinal precepts are protection I've learned there's a world and there's living for Jesus and if you live for the world and go after those things, you'll tend to neglect

your family. It's easy to get off track, and usually the things you do that please God will please your family.

Her: We've seen so many of our young people, you know, courting and becoming engaged and be in counseling and start out the right way . . .

[God's precepts are] for your protection and they're going to get to benefit right from the very beginning. They're not going to have to dig through this and get out of this and re-evaluate this and spend time trying to, you know, think right thoughts and have a right attitude. They're going to start out with that. God's going to bless that.

But being conformed to the image of Christ is going to take care of a lot of things . . . when [your relationship with the Lord] is growing and being nurtured and you are striving after God and seeking Him and things, that takes care of a lot of problems that you would have not only with your spouse but in all areas.

Life Organization

Some couples also said things that pointed out that they saw their religious beliefs as something that helped to set up an organizational framework for their lives. Within this framework certain priorities are already provided for through their religious beliefs.

Three couples indicated that religion makes everything else fall into place.

Her: Like we said before, it just makes everything else fall in place. If you don't have any money, you don't have any food, whatever . . . it's just your priorities.

Him: Yeah, it really sets you priorities for you.

Well, I guess it would be just like the Bible says, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your might and all your soul.' Because if you do that first, just like she said, first, if it's first then everything else will fall in place. If you love God then you're going to have read your Bible daily, you're going to keep His commandments, you know, it's going to all flow from there really.

'Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.' Coming at it from a biblical perspective, marriage is an institution of God. And I believe He has brought the two of us together and we have vowed to Him that we are going to do these things. Well, the more we seek Him and His kingdom, He's not going to be divisive . . . And if we can truly seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, all the rest of the stuff will fall into place.

Others saw their faith as a means of prioritizing the order of their responsibilities.

The general order that they listed was God, then family, and then church.

We started learning in the Bible that we're supposed to love God first and foremost above everybody else, then that put everything in proper perspective and I was able to easier love God first then love my wife in the way that I'm supposed to.

Her: Well, God is first and your first ministry is your family and then church is after that.

Him: [Their child] was having seizures continually and on medication. from time to time he had seizures, he had his neck crippled and God healed him. And so we have our children because of God, and so we have to put Him first. So I think uh, God and then family in that order, it's God that gives us family and children; that's what I believe

Specific Aspects of Religion That Influenced Marital Satisfaction

Not only did these couples say that their religious faith influenced their marital satisfaction, but they also indicated that devotional life and church attendance were the primary means by which that was done. Some of them also said that their faith has a permeating quality that affects every area of life.

Devotional Life

Almost all of the couples interviewed had individual devotions as opposed to couple devotions or family devotions. However they still viewed their devotion time as influencing their spouse and children. Some families did report that they used to have family devotions when their children were younger. As their children grew older and developed busy schedules of their own, family devotions became increasingly more difficult to schedule. Devotion time refers particularly to prayer and Bible reading. Some comments were specifically about these subjects and others were about devotions in general. These general comments are addressed first. Devotions often seemed to serve as a preventative measure against people's natural tendencies. Devotions help a person's attitude, therefore affecting their relationships with other people. One husband stated, "But if I haven't taken time with God, I just feel, I feel miserable inside. And when I feel miserable inside, that affects my relationship with her." His spouse responded in

agreement by saying, "I can tell when he's had his quiet time, when he's home from study. I mean it just enhances, it just makes things calmer, smoother and a little more relaxed."

Another wife was more descriptive of attitude changes when their quiet time did not occur. "Oh, just off the bat, we just both . . . can tell when we haven't had quiet times, it's like [growling]. Little things start flying." Higher stress levels due to periods without devotions are also evident in these statements by a woman and her husband:

I am short tempered. Just anything, I have this low tolerance to overlook whatever little petty thing. It's like, 'OK, so you can tell that I haven't had my devotion today.' I haven't remembered how patient and long suffering he was with me and with my son too. I'm much less patient with him. And he's just one thing after another and by the time [husband] gets home it's like, 'OK I've been putting up with this, this and this and I don't want to put up with anything from you.' And he'll be just like, 'OK, we're leaving so you can be alone.'

After his wife claimed she had a short temper when doing without her devotion time, he made his own claim about how devotions help him by stating, "I'm usually more selfish when I don't have that time."

Others stated that not only could their spouses notice when they were not having devotionals but their relationships with others were affected also. This man summed up in a few succinct words what many couples seemed to be expressing: "Anything that affects your relationship with God is going to affect your relationship with other people."

Another person stated:

If I didn't have and wasn't reading God's Word and doing a daily Bible reading, daily devotional then I wouldn't be very Christ-like and I think that the end result would be problems with my husband and with everybody I come in contact with. And it happens, when I go for, like a week I get really busy and I don't crack a Bible. I heard someone say, you know, the first day you don't spend time with God reading His Word, and that's the way He talks to us now in this day and age, you and God know it. The second day, you and your family know it, that you haven't spent time with God. And the third day, all the rest of the world knows that you haven't spent time with God. (laughter) So it is real crucial to my marriage.

This couple answered together concerning turning their focus on their partner. The wife said, "And I think when we're relying on Christ or focused on Christ we're not as focused on ourselves whereas we can focus on each other and each other's needs." Her husband replied, "Definitely, when you spend time with the Lord it tends to make you focus on others because this human nature will naturally want to focus on yourself." Another wife seemed to agree with their statements: "I think the devotion life of . . . being pleasing to God individually makes it easier to be pleasing to one another." Another gentleman concludes that a lax devotional life could cause unnecessary temptation, which could possibly have a negative relationship toward marital satisfaction.

If we become lax in our devotional life or lax in our prayer life, there's no question that . . . I don't know your background, your beliefs, I believe a literal Satan When I stray from the Word of God, [Satan] knows that and he begins to say 'Here, let me show you something.'

One couple also reflected upon the fact that their devotions, although done separately, were a source of communication for them.

And there's times . . . we use different devotional materials; but both of us, both use My Utmost For His Highest by Oswald Chambers. And there's time, you know, throughout the days or the weeks that I'll say, 'Did you read Oswald today? It was really good.' You know, we'll kind of share back and forth the insights that, you know, are given to us. So we probably have some interaction that way in our devotional life."

Just as many of these couples discussed aspects of devotional life that had an ongoing effect such as changed attitudes and communication. A couple of other women also made statements that seemed to reflect the idea that their devotions had a sustained effect. "It's just always, you know, a blessing that, you know, I can think about it as the day goes on."

God will bring to your mind some passage of scripture that, you know, when conflict happens, it just seems like He's always faithful to not bring you up short and say, 'OK, now, what did we talk about this morning in our quiet time?' you know, and just kind of help guide your day . . . If you start the day or the morning, you know, in prayer and Bible study . . . you can't

help [but] be reminded through the day if conflict comes up maybe of what you read that morning.

Bible Reading

Several couples made specific comments about the impact that the Bible reading portion of devotional life had for them. Some people looked to the Bible for guidance. One man said that the Bible gave many situations that would be very similar and, trying to understand how and why it happened and how to react to situations. Another woman said that the Bible was a source for her to know how to fill the role of a woman. "If I hadn't been in the Word and reading that stuff . . . I wouldn't . . . know some of the things that the Lord directs a woman to do." One man said, "I think it plays an important role because I think God gives the right devotion for the specific time that you have a need." Others noted that reading the Bible affects their relationships with others through learning how to relate to family and also through how their attitude is affected which, in turn, affects others.

Our quiet times are really important and just for instance this morning the scriptures I read were from Ephesians where it talked about family relationships and I think God ordained that even though we're not together reading it He deals with me about how I need to relate to [husband] and how I need to relate to other family members and our future children and so it's really important. It has a big impact.

I read my Bible every day by myself. Uh, when I don't do that, it affects my attitude for everybody else. And it affects my husband. So that, for me, it's a real important aspect

Prayer

Prayer was another important aspect of devotional life for these couples. Just about any kind of concern was made into a matter of prayer. One of the most common was prayer for the spouse. Some prayers were general for strength or for their attitude. Others were more specific such as prompting a needed change in their spouse. A husband prayed for himself so he could fulfill his responsibilities better: "I ask every day, 'Make me,

you know, a better father, a better husband, a better son." One wife noted that she seemed to be able to improve her husband's discouraged attitude through prayer.

And I can tell that [husband] is really tired and discouraged and that he's not looking forward to the next day and I know that it's really hard when you're in that situation and maybe I'll just pray for him that God will really strengthen him. And it seems almost every time that God impresses me to do that, that we wake up and he is in real good spirits. I mean, he will have his quiet time and he'll say, 'God really encouraged me this morning. He really spoke to me, that I need to do this and this or that this has been happening.'

I probably pray for her more about things that I know about her and the needs that she has. Probably, I'm more effective in praying for her than I am at just sitting down and talking about it. So maybe that's what you're talking about in the devotional area. That I'm able to focus more on what her real needs are because whatever my personal makeup or else is, it keeps me from being the sensitive [husband] . . . but sometimes I'm not sensitive enough outwardly but can be when I'm talking to the Father about what her greatest needs are.

Prayer has been real important to me when there have been times when I really wanted him to change in an area when it wasn't my place to call him down on something but I called out to the Lord and I've seen God do some really wonderful things in my husband's life. So that is one of the things that God has taught me as far as interceding on behalf of my husband.

Several couples mentioned types of prayer subjects that touched on their relationship in one way or another. One couple in particular discussed the differences in the way in which they were raised and their prayer for God to smooth out those differences.

There were a lot of similarities but a lot of differences in the way that we were raised. We've been able to pray and just bring that before the Lord and say, 'Take care of this.' So that definitely, because that would kind of smooth, level it out. It's just our perception [that] being able to pray together about it certainly helps.

Another couple addressed their desire for fidelity through prayer. "You need to pray . . . that Satan will keep out of this relationship. I mean, that we'll stay together, there won't be an affair." Other couples also prayed about things that relate to the providence of God, and that appears to create a particular bond between the spouses. "Praying together, we can talk about our needs together with God."

We've had times of frustration or times in our marriage where we've had obstacles, not necessarily with each other, even just financial or whatever and . . . I seen that prayer, that there's been a real strength just to wait on what God has for us . . . I've seen His answers and how he has provided and can care.

A couple of people said that they found guidance through the use of prayer. These examples seemed to be in answer to very specific requests. "But we prayed about it . . . and asked God if that's really how much . . . that He wants to give [to the church building fund] and we felt like it was." Another couple discussed their busy schedule, made busier by their heavy church involvement. They reached a point where they realized that they needed to cut back somewhere and they used prayer as the means by which to seek direction concerning what to continue to do and what to cut out.

And sometimes we over-extend. And that kind of causes some conflict. And yet we can look at it and say we're going to be reasonable and say 'We've over-extended here.' We'll have the Lord show us what to cut out and be obedient to do that.

Attendance

The couples interviewed had much to say about attendance. They viewed attendance as a major player in the carrying out of their faith. They seemed to understand church attendance as important because so many other facets of their faith are manifested as a result of attendance. Because of these facets their statements may very well be summed up by one woman who said, "We may not have the strong relationship we have now if it hadn't been for, you know, going to church together." Togetherness appeared to be an important factor. "Just the fact of sitting in the pew next to him and listening to the sermon and taking it in. It just does something to you; I can't explain what it does." "I think the . . . togetherness, either in going to church or in praying together."

And I love it and now [our daughter] is going to church and she sits there with us and I enjoy that very much, being a family. Uh, it gives me just a peace, peace of mind, a good feeling that lasts throughout the week sometimes.

Just being together, and going for the same reason. Anything in marriage that we unite in together, the same kind of things, you know, you've got the same kind of thoughts the same compassion, the same excitement. It's going to build on your marriage, to make it strong.

One of the most mentioned dimensions of attendance was fellowship. This interaction with other believers was very important in the eyes of this sample. As one man simply says, "I want to interact with other Christians."

Attending church is, yeah, that's good. Uh, for me it's the fellowship with the other couples and I can kind of interact with them and see what they're going through and we kind of relate and you know, just to share.

I mean we can easily grow at home. We can read the Bible, we can pray together. But we don't have the encouragement or the, I keep going back to that word, fellowship. We don't have any of that without actually going to church.

Well, and I guess more than just church attendance. I don't know if you are limited on church, but I think, Sunday School or some type of more intimate or personal type of thing. If we just went to church and went home then I don't think it would mean that much but when you have something to socialize with someone and get to know.

Four people said that church attendance provided a means of guidance for their lives, usually through the preaching service. One man in particular pointed out that one may be less likely to attend church if there are difficulties in the home. However, he believed that answers to difficulties would be more likely to surface if the family continued to attend.

I think too, the element that . . . there's sometimes that you really don't want to come to church because of things that are going on in your life and you go ahead and do that because of the strength of your home and you know you're supposed to do that. Well, there's sometimes when things are going real bad in the home that when you come to church, God supplies insight or direction that helps correct and cure the problems that are happening in the home. I mean, because no matter how good you look on the outside, there's not any home that doesn't have some kind of problem that sometimes crops up. And, being faithful in your church attendance gives you, I think, a better opportunity of coming across the answer that God has to heal that problem.

Attending church because that's something . . . you can do on a consistent basis along with reading the Bible. But it kind of keeps you on track. Just the consistency of it. And hearing the Word of God preached . . . each week keeps that fresh in your mind.

I think, for me, like attending church . . . sometimes it's a struggle to get there. And usually on the days that [are] the biggest struggle, usually there's some message that you've really been needing to hear . . . it really, mainly keeps us on track.

I do see attendance as . . . by us both sitting under [the pastor's preaching] there have been times that the Lord spoke real specifically to me about something.

These couples connected their church attendance with a variety of aspects that could contribute to their marital satisfaction. One woman pointed out that she and her husband make the pastor's sermon a topic of discussion.

But it's, for us to survive, it's essential that we have that back and forth, just to go back and forth with what the pastor said or just to have that, to keep us fresh and to keep us talking about it.

Another woman mentioned the effect that church attendance had on her attitude. "When you go to church, even if you're in a bad mood when you wake up, when you go, you come home and you're just not in a bad mood any more." For a male that was interviewed, attendance sometimes played a role in conflict resolution:

I would have to say that sometimes some of the busy-ness that we get caught up in doing church activities does tend to create friction sometimes but I think more than anything, what I think of, there has been many times when I'll get crossways with [wife] and then we go to church and I get to thinking about it and we realize what really is going on.

Friendship was sighted by one female as an integral part of church attendance because that was where they saw most of their friends and their son's friends :

Going to church is important because that's where the majority of our friends that we fellowship with are And most of the little kids he plays with are from our church, so that's a major thing.

One man pointed out how there is a mutual relationship-building that takes place between the members of a church as they build their relationships with Christ:

Your relationship with Jesus Christ builds as you build those relationships with each other and as you build your relationship with Jesus Christ, those become deeper, so, it all worked together and it's very important to me.

A wife reported that church was a place of support and acceptance where people can be themselves easier than any other place:

But it's a good releasing to be able to be cleansed and to be clean and to be amongst people who believe what you believe and you have a lot of support The world don't want you to be who you are. Your family remembers who you were before; they're the only place where they really accept you for who you are with a love of Christ. And you can really be who you need to be.

One man stated the active ingredient of church attendance is God; saying the attendance itself is not the most important factor, but God. "I don't think it's in the actual attendance like in the legalistic Yeah so I don't look at it as the important thing is attendance; it's just God."

Several couples also mentioned what could be termed an identification aspect of religion. They talked about things that seemed to go beyond just acquaintances. These were the type of things that seemed to result from a comparison of their lives with the lives of others and recognizing that they are not the only people experiencing the situations or problems they face. "You don't maybe feel like you're the only one experiencing something when you're relating to other couples."

You'll see people, you know, you're a member of a church and you really get close with them. You see that those people need help with a problem. Just because that you see them in the church and they are all smiles . . . that they too are human and so that it's OK for you to have problems.

But . . . being around other people, other families, you're able to do some comparison. You're able to offer something that you have done, you're able also to receive . . . about how they raised their kids, how they treated one another.

We do have that group of friends who are within our age group that are dealing with the same life changes and things like that We have all the same interests, same things going on in our lives, kids going off to college

and that, to me, is critical for couples, is to have other couples in their life who they can be open with, vulnerable with.

These couples also said that other people who attend church had been important in their lives, both pastors and fellow members. Their response to a question about how church staff and other members were important in their lives indicated that their needs had been met many times through fellow Christians. One might think that most responses would be about how pastors or staff have met their needs through the years. However, the vast majority of responses were about other church members. By count, pastors were mentioned nine times; other church staff were not mentioned at all; and other members were mentioned forty five times. This group of couples overwhelmingly indicated that other church members had meant the most to them and had been their primary ministers through the years. The most frequently mentioned item (nine times) was that other members were friends, followed by other members serving as a model for them (five times). This was followed by the pastor and his wife being friends which was mentioned four times.

Religious Faith as a Permeating Aspect

Several couples stated that their religion affected every aspect of their lives which points to the multidimensionality of religious faith. These couples indicated that their religious faith was not a Sunday activity only, but rather, a kind of all-encompassing, permeating concept that affects and is displayed through every area of their lives. This belief was stated summarily by these couples and others that follow. "Him: It just . . . affects everything. Her: It affects everything." "So surely Christianity, it invades every part of your life. It has to, that's what it's all about." "I'd say it intertwines. I was going to say it kind of bleeds all the way through all of those things." "Since every one of those activities require church attendance then there's not really a line between church attendance and our daily lives because we're so involved." "I think that your relationship

with the Lord impacts everything in your life." "My faith underlies and intertwines every aspect of my life including my marriage."

Well, I guess it would be just like the Bible says, 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your might and all your soul.' Because if you do that first . . . if it's first then everything else will fall in place.

But regardless, I think, our religion impacts everything in our life Our attitudes when we're at work our jobs and our attitudes and why we are there and what our goal is there and um, doing dishes, I mean pretty much, it's just everything's affected by our relationship with Christ.

Negatives of Religion

Although the positive effects of religion on marital satisfaction vastly outweigh any negatives, there were some negative effects mentioned. These negatives fell into two categories, those that affected the laity and those that affected the church staff member. The negatives for each group were of the same nature, busy schedules, less family time, and additional responsibilities, although at different levels.

Laity

For the average church member, the negative aspects of religion had to do with the additional busy-ness for the family that was created by over-involvement in church related activities and ministries. This over-involvement created extra stress, not enough time for other things, and scheduling conflicts. This family also cited becoming involved in church activities and ministries that God apparently had not led them to be involved in as a possible problem. Thus, this created additional pressures as described by this man:

You know, I think that it probably has to do with us being involved in some things that we probably were not called to do. And because of that, we were doing it with the wrong motives and you get too busy and it creates stress. I start feeling like, 'Well gosh, I don't even have time to turn around now. I have to work and then I have to come home and bla, bla, bla.' She's feeling the same way and we start taking that anger or stress out on each other . . . there have been times when I thought or said, 'you know this can't be God's will to be involved in things that are tearing us apart.' If we are so busy doing religious things so that it's pulling our marriage apart, then we're involved in some things that aren't of God because He's not going to tear our marriage apart. He's going to try to

strengthen our marriage But I guess any kind of activity is going to do that The more activities that we're involved in the more stress there's going to be I don't want to suggest that there is anything more dividing about church activities than any other kind of activities. If anything, they are probably less divisive because it's something that we can do as a family.

This woman noted that she tended to try to be the Holy Spirit for her husband in the early years of their marriage by trying to convict her husband that he needed to do certain things instead of letting the Holy Spirit convict him. Although this caused problems for this couple who were both Christians, one might hypothesize that this type of situation might cause even more marital difficulty in a marriage where one spouse was a Christian and the other one was not.

I've learned a lot of times, we've been married almost seven years and, you know, and when we first started out, a lot of time I would just jump in and say things and he'd kick me and say that I'm trying to be the Holy Spirit.

Church Staff

Most of the negative aspects of religion were brought up by church staff members. This couple discussed the time factor and the extra responsibilities of being on staff, such as being there for family when a person dies and not having the choice of spending time with family or attending church.

Him: To be on staff can be real challenging on the relationship too, just for time.

Her: It's kind of negative in the sense of being on staff . . . we went to take a date the other day and we couldn't because a person died.

Him: It'd be nice to stay home on Sunday night sometimes, with my family. That would enhance our relationship. It really would. Yeah, see Sundays are . . . to be a rest; sometimes in a Baptist Church, they are exhausting.

Another couple made statements that agreed with the time demands and the expectations of church attendance. However, they also discussed the lack of desire for doing religious things at home with family because of being constantly involved with that sort of activity at church. Their concern seemed to be a religious legalism that could result from being required to attend church instead of the freedom to choose church attendance. They also mentioned their concern for the possible effects on their children. These concerns were

that their children see them attending church for the right reason instead of simply because they have to and that the children would not be worn out with church because of going to day care all day and then having church activities so many nights.

Him: Because I'm in the lime light in what I do in my job I . . . really don't want to do things at home, religious things, unless it is something I really want to do.

Her: And when there's a church function at church like we were just talking at dinner that there's something every night next week It's easy to have the wrong motives in doing what you're doing and just go through the motions and I think sometimes that can be a real negative thing on our marriage sometimes we don't feel like there are a lot of choices about our church attendance that is that our children see that we have a full integrated life with Jesus the number one head of our home and that they see why we are going and that it be for the right reasons and not just because we have to I don't want this little one to be worn out all the time, you know, at the baby-sitters all day and then something almost every night of the week. That's a concern because I think that would be a real negative, thing for a little child. I think that could turn a child away from the Lord instead of pointing him or her to the Lord.

The concerns of these pastors was that they find opening themselves and their families up to close friendships with members makes them more vulnerable creating the opportunity for fewer intimate friendships.

They [members] don't like to see the pastor with dents in his armor. You can't talk about your dents. In some ways being a pastor is a negative. It's not, but in some ways it is You can't talk about your problems Being the pastor, you have fewer people that you're going to put a lot of trust in where you speak intimately.

A lot of pastors would be unwilling to open their lives to people in the church. And there is a certain level of caution in that That's risky for a pastor and pastor's wife.

Another staff member discussed negative experiences related to former pastors. Although these experiences left the couple feeling skeptical and with negative impressions, they also said that they were a means that God used to mature them:

I really have a negative impression right now, and still do. I'm very skeptical. Too much so, I'm pretty sure. But I want to say who has a better right. It was really a bad situation, extremely bad. We were dealt

with a lot of things again, it was something God used to help mature me, and even helped our marriage.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

Hansen (1987) suggests that religion is a system that is concerned with the structure of marriage and the interactions that take place within that union. The current study supports the idea that religion contributes to the structure of marriage. Religion's contribution to marital structure was found to take place through defining the roles of husband and wife and through providing guidance concerning parenting. The biblical concept of mutual submission between spouses played a secondary role by further defining the roles and responsibilities of spouses.

The present study supports the general consensus in the literature that church attendance has a positive effect on marital satisfaction (Bahr & Chadwick, 1988; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990). More specifically, this study supports the role of social support in the relationship between faith and family (Abbot, et al., 1990; Robinson & Blanton, 1993), indicating that church attendance and fellowship allow for friendships to evolve. The current study also supports Robinson and Blanton's (1993) concept of moral guidance which is similar to Abbott, et al.'s (1990) divine intervention as an aspect of religious faith which enhances the marital relationship. The current study finds God's guidance for mankind taking place through prayer, Bible reading and the pastor's sermon. The seven facets of emotional support identified in the current study also support and expand upon emotional support as a facilitator between faith and marriage (Robinson & Blanton, 1993) specifically in that religion teaches the family qualities that enhance family life (Abbott et al., 1990).

Religion and marital satisfaction are both multidimensional concepts providing the possibility for a vast array of interrelationships. The area where this study presses beyond previous studies is revealing more clearly *how* religion influences marital satisfaction. The purpose of this study is to identify exactly what the connectors are between these two.

The Bible has an influence upon how these couples perceive their roles. Not only does the Bible help define their roles, but conflict is reduced in this area because scripture is an authority that is accepted by both spouses. This brings closure to certain components of the subject of roles and role responsibilities rather than those components being continually open for debate and disagreement.

All spouses that discussed submission reported that submission was positive for them whether the discussion was about submitting to each other or to God. Submission to each other related to marital satisfaction through such influences as: greater freedom, facilitating decision-making, and conflict resolution. These components of submission are relational issues. For these couples, submission did not consist of rigid rules and gender stereotypes. Rather, flexibility was discovered, while remaining within the biblical guidelines, which produced healthy relational dynamics. Mutual submission to God, as well as the act of praying together, were reported to make submission to each other easier. In submitting to God, they realized that each one had the spouse's best interest in mind rather than self-interest. They realized that their spouses wanted what God wanted: and since that was what they wanted also, the fear of submitting was replaced by trust. Thus, religious faith increased marital satisfaction through mutual submission and trust. This is closely related to the biblical principle of dying to self which results in spouses putting each other's needs before their own.

The Bible also played a major role in how these couples handle parenting. The primary connector is agreement upon any principle that the Bible gives concerning parenting, thereby, decreasing disagreements and increasing marital satisfaction.

These couples discussed the concept of love that they held as a result of their religious faith. This self-giving concept of love, defined in the Bible in I Corinthians 13, was viewed as different than that held by many people and also may be a contributor to increased marital satisfaction. These couples viewed love as self-giving rather than a more self-centered type of love known by many people. Fidelity also was viewed as receiving a positive influence from religious faith because of biblical teachings about remaining true to one's spouse. The Bible helps refine couples' understanding of love and fidelity, which in turn enhance marital satisfaction. Fidelity also was said to improve physical intimacy.

Spouses reported they were more likely to forgive each other because of the forgiveness they received from God. In turn, forgiveness was reported as a means to remove barriers to communication. The couples also reported intervention of the Holy Spirit to enrich communication.

Religious faith greatly increased the unity of married couples through several means. Unity was influenced by the biblical injunction to become one flesh, Bible study, church attendance, devotions, and the discussion of spiritual matters between husband and wife.

The biblical teaching of practicing God's grace at a human level was the impetus for showing forgiveness, unconditional love, and acceptance towards one's spouse. Modeling Jesus, often referred to by the term "Christ-like," was used to increase marital satisfaction by being unselfish, reducing problems, being less judgmental, and using examples of how Jesus related to people as a basis for how to treat others.

Devotional life increased marital satisfaction through several avenues such as decreasing natural tendencies of a negative nature, turning one's focus away from self and toward the spouse, and providing a topic of communication. Prayer was viewed in a positive light because individuals utilized prayer to improve their spouse's attitudes, prompt needed change, lessen the differences between spouses, and request fidelity.

Church attendance promoted marital satisfaction through togetherness, insight for family problems, conflict resolution, and providing a topic of discussion. However, religion did have a negative influence on marital satisfaction on a few occasions. These negative influences were primarily related to increased time demands resulting in scheduling complications. Increased responsibilities and, thus, added stress were also cited. Yet, the positive influences far outweighed the negatives and carried numerous implications.

Implications

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study could have implications for marriage enrichment weekends and /or materials, particularly if they are of a religious nature. Such enrichment experiences and materials may focus on marital satisfaction and also on religion. However, the aspects of religious faith that enhance marital satisfaction may not be well defined. The current study has made more overt how the two are connected. Thus, by concentrating on any of the connections discussed above, the designers and authors of enrichment experiences and materials have a more readily available focus on how couples can use their religious faith to increase marital satisfaction.

For therapists who work with a Christian clientele, the study provides useful information and a more clearly defined focus for designing interventions for the marital dyad and the family system. Likewise, for family life educators and religious educators, programming can be designed to include the connections between religion and marital satisfaction discussed above. Through this means, discord in the marriage and family can possibly be prevented before a severe problem arises.

Implications for Research

The concept of the level of religious life has been raised in the literature. When thought of in terms of this study, one might ask whether one's religious faith influences certain facets of marital satisfaction in different ways at various stages of religious

maturity. Is there a possibility that certain dimensions of marital satisfaction grow and develop only after one has reached a certain level of religious development or do all aspects of marital satisfaction grow and develop equally as religious faith grows and develops?

Another possibility for further research could include various types of personalities. Religion and marital satisfaction both would appear to be somewhat subjective in nature. Therefore, do the connections between religion and marital satisfaction develop differently for different personality types?

This study utilized volunteers from only one religious group to attain as much accuracy as possible for that particular group. The study could be replicated using other denominations within Christianity or other faith groups. This could provide information for each of these groups concerning the implications for practice discussed above.

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TABLES

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Mean	Range	Frequency
Ages - Husbands	41.35 years	25-81 years	
Ages - Wives	39.21 years	27-76 years	
Education - Husbands	16.42 years	H.S.-Dr.	
Education - Wives	14.42 years	8th-M.A.	
Years Married	18.28 years	4-57 years	
Number of Children	1.64	0-3	
Religious Beliefs:			
Liberal			0
In-between			9
Conservative			19

Table 2

ENRICH Scores of Respondents

Couple	Male Scores	Female Scores
1	36	37
2	40	37
3	46	39
4	40	45
5	41	43
6	49	44
7	28	29
8	49	46
9	49	44
10	45	49
11	45	42
12	46	49
13	41	46
14	42	46
15	40	44

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Demographic Profile

Age: Husband _____ Wife _____

Level of Education: Please circle the appropriate level.

Husband: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 over 22

Highest degree completed: High School Undergraduate Graduate Doctoral

Wife: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 over 22

Highest degree completed: High School Undergraduate Graduate Doctoral

Date married: _____

Number of children: _____

Ages of children: _____

How many of these children reside at home with you? _____

How many are married? _____

How many of your children have experienced a divorce? _____

Number of grandchildren: _____

How many of these grandchildren reside with you? _____

What are the ages of those grandchildren who reside with you? _____

Income level:

Less than \$10,000 _____ \$10,000-\$19,999 _____

\$20,000-\$29,999 _____ \$30,000-\$39,999 _____

\$40,000-\$49,999 _____ \$50,000 or more _____

Religious affiliation:

Husband _____ How long? _____

Wife _____ How long? _____

Do you consider yourself to be liberal or conservative in your religious beliefs or somewhere in-between?

Husband: Liberal _____ In-between _____ Conservative _____

Wife: Liberal _____ In-between _____ Conservative _____

APPENDIX B

Protocol

- 1) Does religion enhance or detract from your marital satisfaction and in what ways?
- 2) Which aspects of religious life are most important to your marital satisfaction?
- 3) Does church attendance play a role in your marital satisfaction and if so, in what ways?
- 4) Does devotional life play a role in your marital satisfaction and if so, in what ways?
- 5) Do biblical principles play a role in your marital satisfaction and if so, in what ways?
- 6) Turning our focus away from religion toward marital satisfaction, what are some of the most important characteristics of your marriage that make it satisfying?
- 7) Does your religion affect those things in any way?
- 8) Have people at church, such as pastors, other staff, or members, been important in your lives and if so, in what ways?
- 9) If you could give young couples any advice you wanted to, what would it be?

APPENDIX C

Dear Pastor,

As a graduate student working on my master's thesis at Oklahoma State University I am conducting a research study which will explore the possibility of connection between the religious faith of Southern Baptists and the marital relationship. I am requesting that you announce this study in your Sunday services and encourage those who meet the criteria to volunteer. The criteria are: 1) couples must be members of a Southern Baptist Church, 2) both spouses must be in their first marriage, 3) both spouses must participate. I appreciate your cooperation and will be glad to inform those who volunteer concerning the outcome of the study. Please ask those who are interested to pick up a copy of the enclosed letter for further instructions.

Thank you,

Merle Brock

(405) 969-2102

APPENDIX D

Dear volunteers,

Thank you for your interest in this study. I am a graduate student working on my master's thesis at Oklahoma State University. Let me remind you that the requirements for participation are as follows: 1) couples must be members of a Southern Baptist Church, 2) both spouses must be in their first marriage, 3) both spouses must participate. Please contact (405) 969-2102 to leave notification of your willingness to participate. If I am not available please leave your phone number with my wife or answering machine. If there are more volunteers than required for the study, random selection will be used to arrive at the required number of volunteers. If selected, I will make an appointment with you for an interview in the convenience of your home. This will consist of filling out a demographic profile, an oral interview, and a questionnaire, and will require approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours of your time. Also, you have the freedom to not answer any questions you do not want to answer and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Again, thank you for your participation.

Merle Brock

(405) 969-2102



VITA

Merle Brock

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: HOW RELIGIOSITY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION ARE RELATED IN
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